United Nations CEDAW/C/SR.1618

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

Distr.: General
23 July 2018

Original: English

Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
Seventieth session

Summary record of the 1618th meeting
Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Friday, 13 July 2018, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Chalal (Vice-Chair)

Contents

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention (*continued*)

Combined second and third periodic reports of the Cook Islands

This record is subject to correction. Corrections should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent within one week of the date of the present record to the Documents Management Section (DMS-DCM@un.org).

Any corrected records of the public meetings of the Committee at this session will be reissued for technical reasons after the end of the session.

GE.18-11901 (E) 200718 230718

1811901

Please recycle

In the absence of Ms. Leinarte, Ms. Chalal (Vice-Chair) took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention (*continued*)

Combined second and third periodic reports of the Cook Islands
(CEDAW/C/COK/2-3; CEDAW/C/COK/Q/2-3 and CEDAW/C/COK/Q/2-3/Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of the Cook Islands took places at the Committee table.*

2. **Ms. Rattle** (Cook Islands), introducing her country's combined second and third periodic reports (CEDAW/C/COK/2-3), said that her Government remained committed to upholding the provisions of the Convention and had introduced a series of measures to achieve gender equality and promote the advancement of women's rights, including through the National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment and the attendant five-year Strategic Plan of Action. Numerous task forces consisting of key Government and civil society representatives had also been established with a view to encouraging gender mainstreaming efforts, promoting women's economic empowerment, strengthening women's participation in political and public life and addressing gender-based violence. Mock parliaments for women and girls had also been held with the aim of identifying potential women leaders. The effectiveness of all those efforts had been demonstrated by the appointment of a woman to head the Ministry for Internal Affairs, the increase in the total number of women holding ministerial level positions following the recent 2018 elections and the marked rise in the number of women standing for election. Further affirmative action would, however, be required to increase women's overall participation and representation at all levels of government.

3. Other notable successes had included the launch of the five-year Strategic Plan of Action of the Cook Islands Women and Girls with Disabilities Organization and the introduction of six weeks' paid maternity leave. Efforts were also underway to guarantee women's rights to justice and a life free from violence, including through the Convention's incorporation into the Family Protection and Support Act of 2017, the launch of a women-focused legal aid programme, and the establishment of a sexual and gender-based violence working group. Despite the significant progress made in combating gender-based violence against women, further action was needed to streamline the complaints process, strengthen victim support services and increase the conviction rate for cases of sexual violence. Work to consolidate the progress made towards upholding women's rights and attaining gender equality in other areas of life would also continue, including by improving the participation of women and girls with disabilities, strengthening women-focused sexual and reproductive health services and facilitating access to quality health-care services for rural women. The continued support of civil society and the international community would be vital to that end.

Articles 1 to 6

4. **Ms. Manalo** said that she would like to know what barriers had hindered the Government's attempts to incorporate into the Constitution a definition of discrimination against women in line with article 1 of the Convention. In that context, it would be interesting to learn which articles of the Convention had already been incorporated into national legislation and the timeline for incorporating the remaining articles. She also wished to know what steps had been taken to overcome the obstacles to the development of gender-responsive programmes and the collection of sex-disaggregated data, pursuant to the Committee's general recommendation No. 9 on statistical data concerning the situation of women. Similarly, it would be helpful to learn whether the 2016–2020 National Sustainable Development Plan had taken into account the targets of Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality and how gender had been mainstreamed across all areas of sustainable development policy.

5. In view of the fact that the Office of the Ombudsman continued to monitor the national human rights situation alongside its other functions, she wondered what progress

had been made towards establishing a dedicated national human rights institution in accordance with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (Paris Principles). She would also appreciate further information on the number of human rights violations against women that had been referred to the Office of the Ombudsman and the results of the investigations into those cases. Lastly, she wished to know what efforts had been made to involve women in international efforts to promote the women, peace and security agenda.

6. **Ms. Rattle** (Cook Islands) said that, while there were no plans to amend the Constitution, efforts had been made, as part of the Law Reform Programme, to incorporate the provisions of the Convention into new and existing legislation, including, most recently, the Employment Relations Act of 2012 and the Family Law Bill of 2015. There had also been instances of the courts referring to the provisions of international human rights conventions in their judgments.

7. **Ms. Pokura** (Cook Islands) said that the high turnover of civil servants remained one of the biggest obstacles to the development of gender-responsive programmes. The Government therefore organized regular gender mainstreaming training sessions for new government officials in order to increase their awareness of the concept and encourage the inclusion of a gender perspective in all national programmes and policies.

8. **Ms. Herman** (Cook Islands) said that the Government had reflected the provisions of Sustainable Development Goal 5 in goal 9 of the 2016–2020 National Sustainable Development Plan and that it was committed to collecting sex-disaggregated data to monitor progress in that regard. Sex-disaggregated data were currently collected via the national census and annual labour force and household income surveys. Each government department also collected subject-specific data. The Government intended to take additional steps to improve the collection and analysis of the specific sex-disaggregated data required to monitor the implementation of the Convention.

9. **Ms. Numanga** (Cook Islands) said that the Office of the Ombudsman remained in charge of receiving complaints of human rights violations against women. Up-to-date statistics on the number of complaints received since 2011 were unfortunately not currently available. Consultations regarding the establishment of a national human rights institution had been held with representatives from the southern group of islands in 2017 and the outcomes of those discussions had been presented to Parliament. Further consultations on the matter would shortly be organized with representatives from the northern group of islands, with a view to establishing a national human rights institution by the end of 2018.

10. **Ms. Rattle** (Cook Islands) said that the Government was gradually incorporating the Convention into national legislation, amending laws as and when they came up for review. The Family Protection and Support Act of 2017 and the Employment Relations Act of 2012 had already been modified; the Marriages Act of 1973 and the Crimes Act of 1969 were in the process of being reviewed. Provisions that would permit abortions in certain circumstances were expected to be introduced to the new text of the latter Act.

11. **Ms. Narain** said she was surprised that the Cook Islands was not yet a party to several of the core international human rights conventions, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. She wished to know why that was the case; whether there were plans to ratify those instruments; and, if so, whether a specific timeline for doing so had been established. Noting that the women-focused legal aid programme was limited to providing legal advice and advocacy to victims of domestic violence, she wondered whether there were plans to extend the programme to cover claims of discrimination and whether legal aid was available for appeals to the country's highest court, the Privy Council.

12. **Ms. Rossette-Cazel** (Cook Islands) said that her country was a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, among others. Having recently joined the International Labour Organization (ILO), it had also ratified several of the core ILO conventions. The process of becoming a party to an international convention was quite involved and it often took several years to thoroughly examine, update and introduce appropriate legislation. Traditional leaders also had to be consulted and their views taken into account before legislation could be amended. As a result, it was likely to be three more

years before the legal reforms to bring legislation into line with the Convention were completed. Any recommendations on how to accelerate the process would be welcome.

13. **Ms. Schulz** said that she wondered whether the Government intended to amend the Constitution to guarantee economic, social and cultural rights.

14. **Ms. Rattle** (Cook Islands) said that the Government had no current plans to amend the Constitution; fundamental human rights and freedoms were already protected under article 64. Any gaps in the protection of women's rights would be bridged as and when legislation was reviewed and amended.

15. **Ms. Bethel**, noting that the Gender Development Division had been merged with the Social Policy and Services Division in 2016, giving the latter Division responsibility for a very wide portfolio, asked whether the merged Division had seen any improvements in the delivery of its priorities and objectives; whether it had the structure, authority and human and financial resources to be truly effective; and whether it had decision-making powers. With just two senior officers dedicated to implementing the National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, she wondered how many support staff they could count on; whether those staff had sufficient capacity to carry out gender analyses of government policy and formulate appropriate programmes; and what technical resources were available to help them to carry out the necessary work.

16. She would be interested to know why the National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment had only been partially implemented; what the findings of an evaluation of the Policy had been; how often the State party's gender equality priorities had been reviewed and its targets and priorities reassessed; and whether a new policy supported by adequate funding and technical expertise was envisaged now that the first had come to an end. She would like to know what effect the memorandums of understanding signed between the Ministry of Internal Affairs and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) had had on improving women's economic empowerment, which was one of the priority areas covered by the Policy. Lastly, she asked whether the State party planned to strengthen institutional services for women and improve the dissemination of information and provision of services and programmes provided by the Division, in particular to women living in the outer islands.

17. **Ms. Herman** (Cook Islands) said that, as the Cook Islands had a population of just 17,000, which was smaller than that of many microstates, it was almost impossible to establish separate ministries to deal with issues such as women's or children's affairs, which was why those portfolios were covered by the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Moreover, with just 2,000 government employees, it was rare for officials to specialize in just one issue. In truth, the system worked well; activities and policies could be reviewed on a weekly basis, which enabled officials to improve gender mainstreaming and ensure that the gender perspective was integrated at all times. The current approach also helped to foster strong cultural and community values and engender close ties between the Government and NGOs, not only through financial support but also through active participation in their work and the provision of technical assistance. That said, the possibility of designating separate ministers for each social issue could be worth considering.

18. **Ms. Pokura** (Cook Islands) said that the reassessment of the National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment had found that activities in just two of the priority areas — namely domestic violence and economic empowerment — had been implemented, mainly due to the fact that most of the donor partners involved worked in those areas. However, activities in another priority area — health — had now been initiated by the Ministry of Health. Factors accounting for the partial implementation of the Policy included a high staff-turnover rate and an overambitious forecast as to the number of actions that could realistically be achieved.

19. The lessons to be drawn from the previous National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment had been learned. Implementation of the updated policy would be based on memorandums of understanding with all government ministries so as to ensure participation and accountability. Focal points were set to be established in each ministry in order to increase the number of people actively working on the policy's implementation and

providing appropriate training. In that connection, she wished to note that the memorandums of understanding signed with NGOs had helped to improve access to the labour market for women artisans living in the outer islands.

20. The merger of the Gender Development Division and the Social Policy and Services Division had resulted in a more cross-cutting and unified approach. Following the decision to place all social issues, such as women's affairs, persons with disabilities and children and youth, under the umbrella of the merged Social Policy and Services Division, a greater and more consistent number of support staff had become available.

21. **Ms. Schulz** said that she wondered whether the purpose and nature of temporary special measures had been fully understood by the State party. Temporary special measures were aimed at accelerating de facto equality between men and women and were implemented for the achievement of specific objectives. The programmes described in paragraphs 139 to 151 of the State party's report, concerning temporary special measures, did not meet those criteria, whereas the short-term recruitment of a gender statistician to centralize and improve the management and quality of gender-disaggregated data, as mentioned in paragraph 102 of the report, would qualify. She therefore wished to know whether the State party intended to make further use of temporary special measures in areas in which women were particularly underrepresented or disadvantaged, such as in the fields of health, education and employment. For example, temporary special measures could help to address the gap between women's and girls' academic success and their access to the labour market or leadership roles. Temporary special measures could also be useful in overcoming some of the difficulties faced by women living in the outer islands.

22. **Ms. Rattle** (Cook Islands) said it was fair to say that the nature and purpose of temporary special measures were not fully understood, beyond the concept of increasing women's representation in political life. However, a number of health-related initiatives, including breast cancer screening, had been organized specifically for women living in the outer islands.

23. **Ms. Schulz** said that breast cancer screening would not qualify as a temporary special measure since it was part and parcel of the Government's duty to provide health services to persons in the outer islands. Temporary special measures were intended to address a specific problem and were abandoned once the objective had been achieved. She recommended that the State party should raise awareness of the meaning and scope of temporary special measures in order to facilitate their use in various areas of life, including to increase women's political representation.

24. **Ms. Bethel** said that it was important to assess the successes and failures of the National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment and its corresponding Strategic Plan of Action, in particular since four of the six priorities had not been implemented. She would be interested to know what those four priorities had consisted of and how they would be addressed in the updated policy and plan.

25. She would also like to know more about the National Steering Committee and the Cook Islands National Council of Women. In particular, she wondered what their specific functions were; how they were involved in the advancement of women and women's rights; and to what extent they were integrated into the Social Policy and Services Division.

26. **Ms. Pokura** (Cook Islands) said that the Steering Committee had been established to provide a space for the heads of ministries to come together to monitor progress in gender equality policy implementation in their areas of responsibility. It had, however, proved challenging to ensure the presence of the heads of every ministry at meetings. The National Council of Women was the Government's civil society partner in implementing the activities envisaged in each of the six areas prioritized under the National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment. Gender mainstreaming was among the four policy areas in which progress had not been made during the 2011–2016 period; thus, since gender mainstreaming was an area that the Government wished to develop in the new policy, discussions as to how progress might be facilitated, for example, by placing a focal point in each ministry, were under way. The other areas in which progress had not been achieved were: improving women's capacity to address health issues; improving their capacity to contribute to climate change adaptation strategies; and the equitable

participation of women and men in decision-making and governance systems. After extensive consultations, changes were beginning to be introduced into the policies on women's health and climate change.

27. **Ms. Herman** (Cook Islands) said that, rather than having separate Steering Committee meetings for each social policy area, the Government had decided to establish a National Social Council, composed of all 13 heads of ministries. The Social Council's agenda would encompass all social policy areas, allowing the ministers' time to discuss progress achieved in each. The main reason for which only 50 per cent of the actions envisaged under the previous National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment had been implemented was that the Cook Islands had been overambitious in adopting 170 actions and objectives. The new action plan would be more focused on key priorities and issues.

28. **Ms. Rana** said that she would be grateful for information about the strategies in place to combat discriminatory and gender stereotypical representations of women. Noting that the State party's report mentioned a Media Council that moderated media content and oversaw implementation of a code of ethics for journalists, she asked what training the Media Council provided; whether it covered violence against women and gender-sensitive reporting; whether the possibility of adopting a gender code of ethics was under consideration; what the current composition of the Council was; whether it was independent; what sort of reports it produced, and how often; and whether those reports addressed gender issues and the media portrayal and objectification of women. She would also appreciate details of the new approach to gender in the media that the Government would apparently be adopting, as well as further information about its efforts to raise awareness of gender issues, disseminate information about gender empowerment and ensure that women understood their right to information and were able to access it without difficulty. Noting lastly that many women were reportedly subjected to various forms of physical, sexual and psychological violence by their partners, and that such patterns of behaviour could not be addressed without involving men and boys, she asked what the State party was doing to engage men in the development and implementation of measures to combat violence against women.

29. **Ms. Acar**, noting that the State party's report addressed gender-based violence not under article 5 of the Convention, but under article 12, on health, said that while violence against women was a public health issue, it was first and foremost an issue of discrimination and gender inequality. For that reason, it was vital that policies reflected the intrinsic connection between violence against women and failure to achieve gender equality. She was concerned that, despite a fairly high incidence of domestic violence, reporting rates were low, especially when sexual violence was involved, suggesting that such violence was still considered a private affair. She would like to know what was being done to change that particular stereotypical attitude. Data on the number of cases brought under the new legislation and the number of women's shelters available, as well as details of the training provided to shelter staff, would also be helpful. She urged the Government to consider adopting a comprehensive national strategy to address all forms of violence against women, as the Committee had suggested in its concluding comments on the State party's initial report (CEDAW/C/COK/CO/1). It would be interesting to know how it might approach that challenge, given that, at present, the main protective provisions for women exposed to violence were those of the Family Protection and Support Act of 2017, which did not cover all forms of violence against women.

30. **Ms. Rana** said that she would like to know when the review of the Crimes Act of 1969 would be completed and whether sex work would be decriminalized as a result. Noting the lack of information on sex tourism and trafficking provided in the report, and in view of the increase in tourism in the Cook Islands and the proven link between increased tourism and increased demand for prostitution, she asked whether the Government was considering pre-emptive measures to prevent an attendant increase in prostitution. With that in mind, she would like to know more about the planned study of sex tourism, including the timelines. She also wished to know whether sex workers who were victims of violence, sexual abuse or exploitation reported the abuse to the authorities. Was support provided to women who reported such abuse or were they reluctant to come forward for fear of facing

criminal charges? And did judges, police officers and other law enforcement officials receive training to ensure that investigations and prosecutions of trafficking and related offences involving women and girls were gender-sensitive? Lastly, she wondered whether any exit programmes would be implemented for women looking to leave prostitution; and whether awareness-raising programmes would be used to help to eliminate demand for prostitution and the objectification of women and girls.

31. **Ms. Pokura** (Cook Islands) said that media campaigns and awareness-raising programmes addressing those issues were organized by the Ministry for Health, as that Ministry had funding for such campaigns and had already produced materials that could be used in radio and television broadcasts. With regard to the low reporting rate for domestic violence and sexual abuse, a recent family health and safety study had found that women were reluctant to draw attention to the problem due to a desire to keep peace within the family and maintain the family's good name. Efforts to establish a council of men to address the issue of gender violence had not yet borne fruit, but the 16-day activism campaign against gender violence had brought together many organizations and agencies, including the Council of Women and the police force. The Cook Islands did not have a structure of staffed shelters for women. Shelter was traditionally provided to women victims of violence on a compassionate and voluntary basis. However, the Government had established a working group to develop a comprehensive approach to sexual and gender-based violence, which would address that issue, among others.

32. **Ms. Herman** (Cook Islands) said that the Family Protection and Support Act of 2017 had had a lengthy 10-year gestation period, largely owing to resistance arising from stereotypical attitudes and the great distance between the southern group and the northern group of islands. The length of its gestation had, however, ensured its high quality. To facilitate reporting, the Act provided that women could report sexual and gender-based violence by text message or telephone, without needing to go through a lawyer, and reporting forms were designed to be very easy to complete. Since December 2017, 18 reports had been received, which was a marked increase. In the absence of shelters, churches and other communal buildings were used to host discussions with men and women about how to ensure respectful treatment and avoid physically, emotionally and psychologically harmful behaviour. Traditionally, the family was responsible for providing care and holding family group conferences to seek agreements and solutions to problems. The Government was aware that increasing tourism, and the attendant rise in foreign workers coming to the Cook Islands to serve the tourism industry, could increase demand for prostitution, and it would be proactive in its efforts to address that situation. Exit strategies for prostitutes wishing to leave sex work might be considered, should they become necessary.

33. **Ms. Rana** said that adopting a broader perspective in communications, and involving other ministries rather than centralizing efforts and budgets within the Ministry of Health, might be beneficial.

34. **Ms. Acar** said that the absence of shelters meant that there was a lack of proper support services for women. Furthermore, a family protection law did not necessarily provide full protection for women; where gender equality was wanting, the family could be the first barrier to overcome. The Government should review those issues and consider developing a new law encompassing all aspects of gender-based violence.

35. **Ms. Manalo**, supporting Ms. Acar's suggestion, said that a new law explicitly prohibiting all forms of violence against women would serve to give effect to article 64 of the Constitution. Article 64 provided protection against discrimination on the grounds of sex — and violence against women certainly constituted discrimination — yet apparently no cases had been brought to court under that article.

36. **Ms. Narain** said she feared that the use of family and community conflict resolution mechanisms could tend to favour men. Unless safeguards that protected women's rights were built into such informal structures, a stand-alone law on all violence against women was the best way forward.

37. **Ms. Rattle** (Cook Islands) said that the issue of women's shelters had been under discussion for many years. However, the culture in the Cook Islands was to provide care

within the community; there were no homes for children or even for older persons. The figures for reported cases of domestic violence showed that progress was being made. Whereas in the past, neighbours would ignore evidence of such violence on the grounds that it was a private matter, they were now starting to report incidents, just as they would report any other criminal activity witnessed. The delegation would raise the idea of a stand-alone law on violence against women upon its return home.

38. **Ms. Herman** (Cook Islands) said that the Crimes Act of 2017 criminalized gender-based sexual violence and female genital mutilation. Although the latter was not present in the Cook Islands, the Government wished to make certain that the country did not become a safe haven for such practices in the future. The Family Protection and Support Act of 2017 had replaced three separate antiquated laws under which women and children had been treated as possessions. The new Act did serve to uphold women's rights but the Government could certainly make further progress in that area.

39. **Ms. Manalo** asked whether any cases concerning violence against women had been brought before the courts; and whether there were any court decisions that might serve as precedents to encourage women to file complaints.

40. **Ms. Hofmeister** said that family violence in the private sphere was a widespread problem with repercussions for the dignity of both women and children. It should not be considered a private problem; it was a matter for the State.

41. **Ms. Rattle** (Cook Islands) said that she fully supported those observations and the Government would give the issues due consideration.

42. **Ms. Herman** (Cook Islands) said that, despite the confidentiality agreements in place, there were trust-related problems associated with procedures for reporting violence against women; because of the nation's small population, there was often a connection of some sort between the public officials who received the complaints and the complainants. Women therefore more readily accepted counselling from representatives of NGOs working in the field of violence against women who came to the Cook Islands to deliver technical assistance. The Cook Islands Media Council was an independent body composed of representatives of the small number of radio stations, television channels and newspapers operating in the Cook Islands. The Council included a representative of the judiciary.

Articles 7 to 9

43. **Ms. Schulz** asked how many women had been elected to Parliament following the 2018 general election and how many of them held ministerial portfolios, in comparison with the previous Government. She asked what measures had been taken to ensure an increase in women's representation as members and chairs of the outer islands councils since the termination of the Commonwealth Local Governance Fund project in 2013. She would like information on measures taken to systematically increase women's representation in senior management in the public sector, including updated figures showing the current situation, and on measures to increase women's representation in the judiciary and judicial institutions. She wondered whether the Government would adopt temporary special measures through a Constitutional amendment or statutory provision to ensure a gender balance in Parliament or whether other measures would be taken to secure the same result. She would also like to know how the electoral management body incorporated the principles of gender equality into civic engagement activities; how it ensured that information on women's right to participate in political and public life reached men and women equally; whether measures would be taken to ensure a gender balance in appointments to government boards and senior-level government posts; and whether the Government would support the Women Parliamentarians Caucus in developing temporary special measures to ensure women's equal representation. Lastly, she asked how many women currently held positions in the House of *Ariki* (traditional chiefs) and the *Koutu Nui* (subchiefs); whether those institutions contributed to advancements in gender equality; and how their contributions might be enhanced.

44. **Ms. Narain** asked whether, under the Citizenship Act, men and women had equal rights to transfer their nationality to their children. She would also like to know how women migrants' rights were being protected while the new immigration policy was still

being formulated; whether public consultations on the new immigration policy had been completed; whether consultations had also been held with NGOs, civil society and representatives of women migrants; and what safeguards the draft immigration policy contained to ensure equality for women migrants. Could women migrants acquire citizenship on an equal footing with men?

45. **Ms. Rattle** (Cook Islands) said that the outer islands had established independent island councils pursuant to the Outer Islands Local Government Act of 1987, which did not provide for temporary special measures to be used to increase women's representation. The electoral councils of three islands included women representatives, including one mayor and a deputy mayor. The possibility of revising the Electoral Act of 2004 with a view to boosting women's representation had been discussed. Men as well as women participated in the Women Parliamentarians Caucus, the aim being to engage men in women's rights initiatives. The main points currently being discussed before the Caucus were the adoption of a gender-sensitive State budget and women's participation in select government committees. At present four members of Parliament were women. Traditionally, there had been more women than men in the House of *Ariki* and the *Koutu Nui* as gender was not a barrier to inheriting the traditional titles that conferred membership of those bodies. Environmental conservation and protection were the main concerns the bodies generally took up with the Government.

46. The 2018 general elections had resulted in a hung parliament. A number of electoral petitions challenging the results had been filed and the new Parliament would not sit for the first time until the outcome of those petitions had been finalized.

47. **Ms. Rossette-Cazel** (Cook Islands) said that the Cook Islands were in free association within the Realm of New Zealand and that, under the Constitution, all Cook Islanders had New Zealand citizenship. Men and women, on an equal footing, could transfer New Zealand nationality and Cook Island permanent residential status to their children.

48. **Ms. Schulz** asked how many women were represented in the current coalition Government and how many women held positions in the other political parties. She hoped that the Women Parliamentarians Caucus would encourage the use of temporary special measures to increase the number of women elected to Parliament. Devolved local authorities were not exempt from the obligation to apply the Convention and it was therefore also important to address the issue of women's representation on the outer islands. She wondered whether the voices of the women in the House of *Ariki* and the *Koutu Nui* were heard clearly.

49. **Ms. Rattle** (Cook Islands) said that although there had been no increase in the number of women elected to Parliament, a greater number of women had nevertheless stood for office, which indicated that change was imminent. As Speaker of the House, she herself held an appointed, not elected, position. There were three women in the opposition party, one of whom had been assigned the ministerial portfolios for health, justice and parliament. It would have been reasonable to assume that the traditional gender mix of the House of *Ariki* and the *Koutu Nui* would have been reflected in strong leadership by women and a more even gender balance elsewhere, including within the formal system, but unfortunately that had not been the case.

Articles 10 to 14

50. **Ms. Arocha Domínguez** asked to what extent data and indicators were used by the State party to measure advances in women's and girls' access to education and monitor any obstacles that remained. She would like to know how many children had benefited from the inclusive education policy; how many remained to be incorporated into mainstream schools; and what prevented their inclusion. In view of the increase in remote and digital teaching, she wondered what was being done to develop a comprehensive policy to gauge and ultimately prevent the use of school materials that endorsed gender stereotypes and to ensure that children and adolescents received adequate sex education. In that connection, she wished to know how many pregnant girls of school age had benefited from measures to ensure that they continued their education and what forms of support they had received. She

would also like to know whether there were incentives for girls who obtained grants to study abroad to take up male-oriented subjects, such as science, technology and mathematics; and whether vocational training provided abroad was linked to the needs of the domestic job market so as to encourage students to return home and guarantee that work was available for them.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.